The Terrible Winter of 1830

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One of the worst winters in Fairbury history was the terrible winter of 1830-1831. Historians called it the "Winter of the Deep Snow." In the fall of 1830, Valentine Darnall and his family settled about four miles south of Fairbury on Indian Creek. They were the first white settlers in Livingston County.

Mr. Darnall first built a log cabin for his family to survive the upcoming winter season. Mr. Darnall then decided to travel to Mackinaw and procure pork for a food supply during the winter. Mackinaw was about 50 miles southwest of the Darnall farm south of Fairbury.

Heavy snow began to fall as Mr. Darnall made his way to Mackinaw. Mr. Darnall decided the snow was too deep to drive his wagon back to Fairbury. He left his wagon and one horse at Mackinaw. Mr. Darnall bundled himself and began the trip back home on horseback carrying half of a hog.

There was nothing but an open prairie between Mackinaw and Fairbury with no distinguishing landmarks. Mr. Darnall also did not own a compass. Sometimes he could only see a few feet in front of him because of the blizzard "white-out" conditions. Snow drifts made the trip very difficult.

Valentine Darnall started to worry about the safety of his wife and their six children living in the crude log cabin south of Fairbury. Their children included Jonathan, Mary, Alvira, Malvia, and Nancy. They ranged from age two to age 12.

Thirty-three-year-old Mr. Darnall continued his journey through the blizzard conditions. The snow drifts averaged four feet in depth, but his horse could wade through them. The sun started to set, and Mr. Darnall feared he would never see his family again. Then, the clouds parted, and the sunshine lighted the area. Mr. Darnall was able to see and recognize some treetops that surrounded his cabin. After being gone from home for four days, Mr. Darnall had successfully found his house and family.

As Mr. Darnall rode the last of the way to his cabin, he noticed four wild hogs he had been trying to tame for some time. The hogs were so hungry they followed him to Indian Creek, near his cabin. Mr. Darnall was elated to find his wife and children safe inside the cabin. The snow drifts around the cabin were eight feet deep.

When Mr. Darnall left on his trip to Mackinaw, he left three young calves in a rail pen in the yard next to the cabin. When the blizzard started, his 37-year-old wife moved the three calves from the pen to inside the cabin so they would not freeze to death. Mrs.

Darnall dressed in a pair of her husband's trousers to enable her to get through the snow and clear the calf and sheep pens.

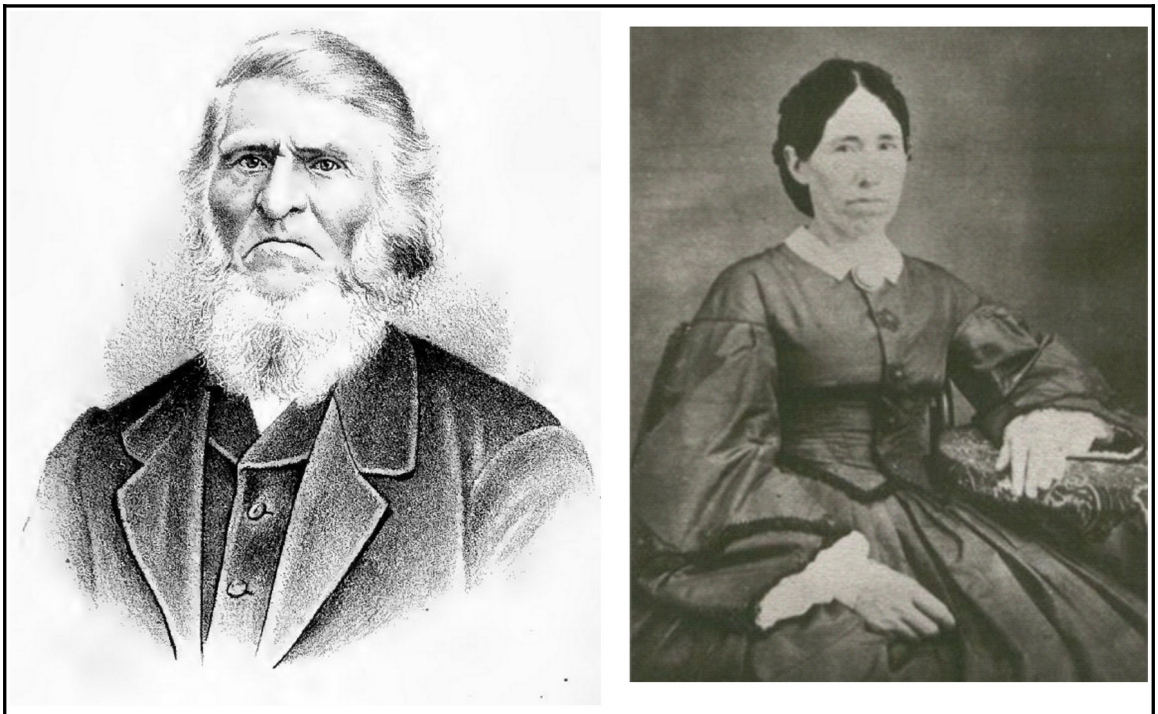
The next day after Mr. Darnall returned home, he got the four wild hogs herded back to his cabin. He slaughtered two to provide meat for his family through the winter months.

During the rest of the winter, Mr. Darnall cut enough timber to make 3,000 wood rails. Mr. Darnall's animals successfully made it through the very tough winter.

In 1837 after Livingston County was formed and surveyed, Valentine Darnall bought land from the Federal Government in Section Four of Belle Prairie township.

Rachael Steers, the wife of Valentine Darnall, died in 1872 at the age of 79. Valentine Darnall died in 1892 at the age of 95.

Thankfully, the Valentine Darnall family survived "The Winter of the Deep Snow" in 1830. Many of the descendants of the Darnall family still live in the Fairbury area.



Valentine Martin Darnall and his wife Rachel Steers. They were the first pioneer settlers in the Fairbury area in 1830.